



The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Trumpeter

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www.MRVAC.org

January – February 2021

Josh Sweet, Trumpeter Editor
jhsweet0201@gmail.com

Successful GiveMN Fundraiser

by Bob Williams, Board Member

It has been a challenging year for fundraising during the pandemic. MRVAC was unable to hold its Annual Holiday Auction, traditionally a major fundraising event for the organization. As a result, we focused on GiveMN's Give to the Max Day to try to make up for that.

Our board pledged \$1,425 as a matching grant and we received 24 totaling \$1,228. We thank all of you for your generous support. It allows us to continue making grants available to local organizations who need help with projects that fit within the guidelines of our mission. For more information about MRVAC, its activities and some of the projects that we have supported in the past, visit our website at www.MRVAC.org.

2021 MRVAC Grants Available!

Each year, MRVAC awards grants to organizations that support our mission of providing leadership in promoting environmental awareness, education and advocacy action, especially relating to the wildlife and habitats of the Minnesota River Valley.

If you are interested in receiving a grant from MRVAC, please fill out the Grant Request Form online at www.MRVAC.org/grants. Your proposal will be reviewed by a volunteer and someone will acknowledge your application soon. Decisions about grant approvals will be made in the spring.

MRVAC is proud to have helped numerous conservation and birding efforts. Listed here are a few of our past grant recipients: The Izaak Walton League of America, East Side Neighborhood Services, Friends of the Sax Zim Bog, Richardson Nature Center, Refuge Friends, Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, and Audubon Center of the North Woods.

Special Virtual Presentations

Our next two MRVAC member meetings will feature special virtual presentations. A Zoom link will be sent out in a MRVAC email closer to each meeting date. Feel free to share the link with others. All ages. Free.

Topic TBD
Ken Kaufman, Author

Thursday, January 28, 2021, 7:30 PM
Virtual Presentation on Zoom

Nationally renowned author of field guides and other books such as *Kingbird Highway*, Ken will join us for an insightful evening presentation.

"Owls of the Eastern Ice"
Dr. Jonathan Slaght, Author

Thursday, February 25, 2021, 7:30 PM
Virtual Presentation on Zoom

Minnesota author who recently published the *Times Nature Book of the Year*, Dr. Jonathan will take us on an adventure into the Siberian winter to find, study, and hopefully save the world's most elusive owl.

Trumpeter Award Nominations

The Trumpeter Award is given to one of MRVAC's members for outstanding long-term contributions to the organization. The Selection Committee, which is comprised of the previous years' recipients, review the nominations and forward their choice to the Board. This award is presented in the spring.

To obtain a Trumpeter Award Nomination Form, please visit www.MRVAC.org/Trumpeter-Award. Rather than submitting a form on the website, please email your completed form directly to MRVAC Board President, Matthew Schaut at mschaut22@yahoo.com. A complete list of previous Trumpeter Award recipients can be found on page 3 and at www.MRVAC.org.



Local News

Minnesota Young Birders Club is back!

by Three Rivers Parks Staff

The Minnesota Young Birders Club is coming back after a several year pause and will be re-branded as The Three Rivers Young Birder's Club. The club as originally started at Warner Nature Center on the east side of the twin cities by naturalist and birder Kirk Mona. Six years ago he brought the club with him when he changed jobs and came to Lowry Nature Center on the west side of the metro.

The club was paused a few years back to allow time to re-think how to best reach youth and better utilize the broad reach of the Three Rivers Park District. Three Rivers manages 27,000 acres of park land and bird habitat mostly in the western metro. This land includes the Audubon designated Important Bird Area of Murphy-Hanrehan park which is the only known regular nesting site for Hooded Warbler in the metro. Three Rivers has also been instrumental to the reintroduction of Canada Geese, Trumpeter Swans and Osprey in the state. With that rich legacy they are excited about hosting the club.

Three Rivers is doing a soft relaunch of the program starting in spring of 2021 with the goal to fully relaunch as part of Three River's "Big Year of the Bird" which will be a year-long celebration in the parks in 2022. "We were looking to expand the program and be decentralized." Explained Mona. "We are changing the name to be more representative of the metro nature of the club but also because we will be based in more than one park. This truly is a district-wide effort now."

The new version of the club will be based out of Three River's Parks main educational centers; Lowry Nature Center in Carver Park, Eastman Nature Center in Elm Creek Park, Richardson Nature Center in Hyland Park and the education center in Mississippi Gateway Park. Club activities will rotate between the centers monthly and eventually leave their home parks as well for other adventures around the metro. There are bird based summer camps planned as well.

Also new with the re-branding and re-launch is a new age structure for the club. "There was a lot of demand for programs for younger birders," Said Mona. The old version of the club was for teenagers. The new version of the club will also be for ages 9-12 but they aren't forgetting the teens. Teenagers will be invited to volunteer to help mentor younger birders. As a reward, the older teen birders get to be a part of the teen team that will get exclusive events of their own such as visiting owl banders at night or taking part in big day competitions. The plan is to create a pathway for passionate young birders to stay involved in the club as long as possible and eventually find a community of birders who can support them on their journey.

If you know of youth or teens who would like to get involved they can visit the club's home on Facebook which is the easiest way to keep track of events when they start up this fall. Simply search for Three Rivers Young Birder's Club on Facebook.

I-35W Minnesota River Bridge

Construction Update:

Republished from MnDOT, Submitted to the Trumpeter by Steve Weston, Board Member

Black Dog Trail Reopens: We're pleased to share that the Black Dog Trail between Black Dog Road and Cliff Road will reopen to the public by 6 AM on Monday, November 9, 2020. Whether you use this trail recreationally or as part of your commute, thank you for your patience and cooperation while it was closed for construction.

Minnesota River Bridge Multiuse Trail Opens: When the Black Dog Trail reopens, people walking and bicycling will also be able to use the new multiuse trail on the Minnesota River Bridge. This trail connects to the Black Dog Road Trail on the Burnsville side of the river and to Lyndale Avenue South via a new trail on the Bloomington side of the river.

Prior to the Minnesota River Bridge replacement, a dedicated walking and bicycling path over the river along I-35W did not exist. This trail will improve area access while offering scenic views of the river valley.



American Black Duck at Mill Pond near the Wilkie Unit of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: J. Sweet

MRVAC Field Trip Update

by Craig Mandel, Field Trip Coordinator

Due to current social distancing guidelines in place, there are no field trips sponsored by MRVAC scheduled for the months of January and February.

The Ecuador Choco Andes Birding Tour has been rescheduled for October 31 – November 11, 2021. Registration for this field trip is available on the Holbrook Travel website. If you would be interested in joining this or another international tour, please feel free to contact me.

Please direct any questions about MRVAC Field Trips to Craig over the phone at (952)-240-7647.



The Green Scene

More Pollinator Gardens in the Works

by Lee Ann Landstrom, Board Member

In the November-December issue, I wrote about Poplar Grove Elementary school in Bloomington, who used \$1,280 from MRVAC to purchase and plant a native species-pollinator garden at their school this fall. I am now working with two other Bloomington schools who plan to plant pollinator/rain gardens this spring.

Jefferson High School has a student club called Earth Corps who really wants to develop a “Unity Garden” for the school. Three students are working on developing a plan, a work crew, and general support for the native species garden on the France Avenue side of the school. The principal is behind the project; they also have several City people advising, as well as an individual who owns a small landscaping company.

The City’s Sustainability Commission gave \$500 to do a full site assessment and plan. Over the winter, they will meet with the Buildings and Grounds staff, finish the site plan (approximately 30’ x 30’ for phase one), and determine how many and what kind of plants to purchase. Besides forbs, they will also have some berry-bearing shrubs for birds. The students are also working to involve various academic classes, clubs, and teachers who will use and/or help maintain the garden once it is installed. There’s a rough estimate of \$2,000 for the purchase plants that MRVAC is intending to donate to the project.

Normandale Hills Elementary is forging ahead on their plans for a large raingarden using native species. They are working closely with the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District. A parent has covered the grass to kill it. Fourth grade science students are calculating the amount of soil and mulch that will be needed. The plant list is being created. In January, the PTA and parents will be updated and volunteers will be solicited. A plan will be made to do the actual planting - complying with COVID-19 guidelines; however, the goal is to involve many grade levels so that the students are invested in the garden. There already is a vegetable garden on site, supported by parents over the summer, so this sort of garden maintenance is not new to the school.

The Watershed District will provide a sign that explains the rain garden basin’s purpose; they will also provide educational workshops and videos that teachers can send to their students about types of plants and pollinators and phenological information. MRVAC has tentatively offered \$2,044 towards this project (which is also matched by the NMCWD).

New Year’s Resolutions

by Anne Hanley

Many of us make resolutions at this time of year: eat better, exercise more.... I encourage you to add a conservation resolution or two to your list. For example, I will:

- ✓ Walk or bike to all destinations within ____.
- ✓ Reduce my electricity consumption by ____ (doing what) or (by how much) ____.
- ✓ Avoid buying plastic packaging, even “recyclable” plastic bottles because I know there must be a market for the plastic to be truly recyclable.
 - Shop the bulk aisle at the grocery store and bring my own containers.
 - Cook from scratch.
- ✓ Resist the urge to upgrade my phone every year.
- ✓ Support companies who plan for eventual product return and recycling of their product.
- ✓ Learn how to repair and mend to reduce the pounds of things I throw away (from YouTube and Fix-It Clinics).
- ✓ Buy less and buy used, and rent or borrow things when possible.
- ✓ Add ____ square feet of native plants to my yard this year.
- ✓ Volunteer on invasive plant control projects.

Past Trumpeter Award Recipients

See page 1 for nomination information.

- 2001 - Karol Gresser
- 2002 - Joe White
- 2003 - Pat & Jack Telfer
- 2004 - Edith Grace Quam
- 2005 - Craig Mandel
- 2006 - John Rehbein
- 2007 - Lois Norrgard
- 2008 - Jack Mauritz
- 2009 - George Tkach
- 2010 - Bob Leis
- 2011 - Anne Hanley & George Skinner
- 2012 - Steve Weston
- 2013 - Bob Williams
- 2016 - Mark & Becky Lystig
- 2018 - Dave & Rita Baden



National Audubon Spotlight

This Winter Marks an Incredible 'Superflight' of Hungry Winter Finches

Across the country, birders are being treated to one of the biggest irruption years of boreal birds in recent memory.

By Ryan F. Mandelbaum, Audubon Magazine

The year 2020 will be remembered for a lot of reasons, but for birders across the country, one of them will actually be good: the biggest irruption of northern finches in recent history. This year has seen huge movements of these birds southward, and many have reached astonishing places far from where you'd expect to find them.

Finch researchers are calling this year a "superflight," where every species of boreal finch is irrupting, or moving southward in search of food. A perfect storm of feast and famine appear to be driving this banner finch year, affecting Common and Hoary Redpolls, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Red and White-winged Crossbills, and Purple Finches. Other irruptive passerines, like Blue Jays, Bohemian Waxwings, and Red-breasted Nuthatches, are also on the move. "There's not enough food to support them, so they're just spilling out of the boreal forest," says Matt Young, ornithologist and founder of the Finch Research Network.

Many of North America's finches live in the forests of Canada (and in northern parts and higher elevations of the United States), where they rely on a selection of conifer or other boreal trees for food—especially their fruits and seeds in the winter. However, many of these trees produce food in cycles, supplying an abundance of seeds in "mast years" and very little to no sustenance in other years. Birds dependent on these trees undergo movements in response to these cycles, staying and breeding in areas where seeds and fruits are plentiful and heading elsewhere when crops fail. In a meager year for seed stocks, birds will dip southward in search of food, and during a widespread crop failure, they venture far into the United States to find sustenance. This is one of those years.

Scientists think the trees evolved these synchronous mast-crop cycles in order to limit the food supply for seed-eating squirrels, preventing their populations from growing too large and eating all of the seeds, explains Jamie Cornelius, an assistant professor at Oregon State University who studies crossbills and is a member of the Finch Research Network. But unlike the squirrels, "birds are mobile, and can find cone crops somewhere else," she says. In some cases, these birds have evolved strategies to cope with the occasional crop failures; crossbills molt slowly, for example, so they can be ready to fly at any moment should food run out.

These irruptions have always been a major winter event for birders and ornithologists, but they've recently become more predictable thanks to the annual Winter Finch Forecast, a

report started by Ron Pittaway and now run by Tyler Hoar. The forecast uses mast-crop observations from across Canada to predict the movements of finches and other boreal species each winter. This year's forecast predicted notable movements for a handful of species, but once fall began, more birds started moving south into the U.S. sooner and in much larger numbers than expected. Why the numbers have surpassed expectation isn't clear—the pandemic made it difficult to collect data from the far north—but widespread crop failure is believed to be the main cause.

First came the Red-breasted Nuthatches in the summer; this "honorary finch" undergoes similar irruptive behavior, and its early movements can foretell a strong finch flight. Then, the finches began arriving, inundating northern feeders before heading south in a trickle and then a full-blown wave. Purple Finches led the way, followed by enormous flocks of Pine Siskins, including a more than 10,000 passing through Cape May's Higbee Beach in one day. Evening Grosbeaks were next, along with Redpolls and Red Crossbills. The movements have brought mind-boggling records: a Common Redpoll visited a feeder in Albuquerque, New Mexico, while a pair of Evening Grosbeaks were found in the Florida Panhandle. Pine Siskins began migrating at night—extremely unusual for the species—and even made it to Bermuda. Meanwhile, Arctic-residing Hoary Redpolls turned up in Cleveland, Ohio.

According to Young, this year's incredible show isn't just a product of crop failures, but also the result of a hugely successful breeding year driven by spring food surpluses. Eastern boreal forests are experiencing their largest spruce budworm crop in decades, for example. A bane to loggers, spruce budworm larvae hatch in late spring and feast on the needles of balsam firs and spruces, which can ultimately kill the trees. The outbreak led to booms in eastern Evening Grosbeak and Purple Finch populations, who feed on the budworm. Further fueling their numbers, researchers hypothesize, was the fact that Quebec wasn't able to fully treat its forests for budworms due to COVID-19 restrictions. Meanwhile, large spruce-cone crops led to population surges of Red and White-winged Crossbills. And Pine Siskins, which are generalists, benefitted from both the budworms and spruce-cone crops. "These populations are growing to a high level that we haven't seen in a long time across all of these finch species," Young says.

The abundance of summertime food followed by the widespread crop failure unexpectedly lined up for finches across species and across North America, says Hoar of the Finch Forecast. There were few food sources for the budworm-loving birds once the budworm season ended, and the scarcity of food wasn't just limited to forests in northern Canada. "The food sources that would have held back most of those finches in southern Canada and northern border states were mostly quite poor," he says. "So the birds kept moving further south in search of food."

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Distance Learning Opportunities



Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Bloomington, Minnesota

Special Presentations over Zoom

Our next two MRVAC member meetings will feature two incredible authors over Zoom. Ken Kaufman will be giving a special virtual presentation in January and Dr. Jonathan Slaughter in February. More information on page 1 and on our website. www.MRVAC.org

January 28, 2021: Ken Kaufman
Topic TBD

February 25, 2021: Dr. Jonathan Slaughter
Owls of the Eastern Ice



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Project Learning Tree Activities

Overwhelmed? You're doing fine. Breathe. Everyone is struggling through this time, and no one expects perfection. We applaud everything you do to help our children and educators. We hear you're looking for lessons and student handouts that get kids outdoors. Try these! www.bit.ly/3rcD3LL



International Owl Center
Houston, MN

Virtual Owl Speaker Series

Join us from the comfort of your home on Sundays at 1:00 PM throughout the winter of 2020-2021 to learn more about owls from experts around the world. We aim to make these live, virtual programs free for all to attend as long as we can continue to find generous sponsors. Once you register to attend you will automatically receive an email with a link to use to join the program via Zoom. www.internationalowlcenter.org

January 3, 2021: Dr. Roar Solheim (Norway)
Tracking Great Gray Owls

January 10, 2021: Dave Oleyar (USA)
Following Forest Owls

January 31, 2021: Milan Ruzic (Serbia)
Owl We Need is Love

February 7, 2021: Motti Charter (Israel)
Using Barn Owls in science, pest control, and regional cooperation in Israel

February 14, 2021: Marjon Savelsberg (Netherlands)
Eurasian Eagle Owls



Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center
Sandstone, MN

Wednesday Webinar:

Creating Yarn and Natural Dyes

Wednesday, January 6, 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Kick off the New Year with some new skills! In this free webinar, our education staff members, Ashley and Allie, will introduce you to the process of turning fluffy wool into yarn, as well as how to use natural dyes to color your new yarn!

Making fiber art is a great way to create something unique with your hands, and wool is a dynamic material that has a myriad of uses to explore. This is an introductory class and all are welcome to join! Register online at www.ospreywilds.org.

Virtual Afterschool Programs

Various Dates

Beginning January 11, Osprey Wilds is offering virtual afterschool programs for students of all ages. Our staff will be leading programs that range from theater, crafts, exploring nature, and more. Learn about each program, age recommendation, needed materials, and more by visiting www.ospreywilds.org.



Lowry Nature Center of Three Rivers Parks
Victoria, Minnesota

Intro to Nature Photography

Online Class

Thursday, January 14, 6:30 – 7:30 PM

Learn how to explore the natural world through the lens of a camera. Discuss introductory photography concepts and practice photography exercises before, during and after. Technology questions answered if time permits. Participants will need a smartphone, tablet, point-and-shoot or DSLR camera. Reservations required by four days prior online at www.threeriversparks.org. Ages 12+. \$5.

Birds for Beginners Online Class

Saturday, January 16, 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Learn the basics of birds with Naturalist Kirk from the comfort of your own home. Discuss what birds are here in winter, how to view them, how to get started birdwatching at home and more. Reservations required by two days prior online at www.threeriversparks.org. Ages 14+. Free.



Minnesota River Valley
 Audubon Chapter
 P.O. Box 20400
 Bloomington, MN 55420

Minnesota River Valley
Audubon Chapter
Membership Form

To join the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter (MRVAC), please complete this form and mail it with a check, made payable to MRVAC, for at least \$15 to:

Membership Coordinator
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
PO Box 20400
Bloomington, MN 55420

Yes! Please enroll me as a member of the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter. I will receive the *Trumpeter*, MRVAC's newsletter, along with notifications of chapter meetings and field trips. (Memberships are renewable annually.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Check one:

- I would like to receive the *Trumpeter* newsletter and other updates via email.
- I would like to receive a printed copy of the *Trumpeter* newsletter by USPS mail.

Volunteering (optional):

- I am interested in volunteering for MRVAC. Please contact me.

Areas of Interest:

- Field Trips
- Conservation and Environmental Action
- Habitat Restoration Work
- Activities with Children
- Chapter Administration
- Other: _____

The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Thank you for joining!

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The West has coincidentally gotten a taste of the finch fun for reasons unrelated to the boreal forests. Southern California-breeding Lawrence's Goldfinches have poured into Arizona as part of their own food-dependent cyclical movements, and Cassin's Finches have shown up farther east than usual, perhaps due to their own irruptive cycles aligning with this past summer's wildfires, says Young.

The Evening Grosbeak showing is perhaps most notable. The striking finches have become increasingly scarce in the eastern U.S., so such a big irruption has been thrilling for birders and experts. While this year's irruption isn't record-setting, future irruptions could be, say Young and Hoar. Both point to a budworm outbreak in the 1970s that brought Evening Grosbeaks to feeders across the country in droves. As the current budworm outbreak intensifies in the coming years, it may continue to drive Evening Grosbeaks and even bigger irruptions that could rival those numbers from the 1970s.

Luckily for birders stuck at home during this pandemic-stricken 2020, all of these finches are hungry and showing up anywhere there's a meal. "Winter finches are saying 'hey, we need food, we need food,'" Hoar says. So if you can do so safely, get outside and try to find some of these winter visitors at your local park. And if you have feeders, be sure to keep them stocked, maybe buy some backup seed, and enjoy the show.